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Making Social Care
Better for People



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Dear Carol

2006 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CALDERDALE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This letter summarises the findings of the 2006 annual performance assessment (APA) process for your local authority. We are grateful for the information which you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Summary

Areas for judgement	Grade awarded¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3
The council's overall <i>capacity to improve</i> its services for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	2

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Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Excellent / outstanding
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council has improved its services with the result that outcomes for young people have also improved and they are now good. The council's action plan to address the recommendations from the joint area review is comprehensive, costed, and identifies responsibilities clearly. The council has addressed each action point in detail and has been able to demonstrate progress on all with improved outcomes in a significant number of aspects. In particular, the council is able to demonstrate that its own structures enable different services to coordinate their work in a more timely manner and provide better support for children and young people. Several key indicators exemplify the effect of the council's work in the eight months since the area review. In discussion, the authority was able to illustrate, for example, its lively and accessible communication for both children and young people, as well as their families and carers, which responded to consultation with them. The detailed work on deciding priorities across the borough and clear planning to meet the council's targets for improvement confirm the view of last year's joint area review that the council has good capacity to improve.

There are some areas of council services which have improved more slowly and some where outcomes are planned for, but will not take effect until the next year.

Being healthy

The contribution that the council's services makes to improve outcomes for children and young people in this area is good, and this was the finding of the joint area review. However, the review also made two recommendations in this area and both are partly dependent on the council's partner agencies in health. The council needed to agree on a commissioning strategy for in-patient mental health services. It also needed to ensure that those young people with learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities were supported in their move from paediatric to adult health services.

The council has engaged the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to develop capacity for provision of in-patient mental health services for young people. The council and the PCT have indicated that plans are being developed for young people receiving paediatric care to move into adult care services. For all looked after young people this is already the case. The council demonstrated that it has successfully engaged health partners on these issues, although outcomes are not yet evident.

The council has also demonstrated progress in other areas such as the reducing rate of teenage pregnancies, which, although variable in previous years, is now the lowest in West Yorkshire and one of the most improved in the Yorkshire and Humber Region.

The council, jointly with the PCT, has ensured dramatic improvement in the healthcare arrangements for looked after children and young people. In 2004, less than half of the looked after children had health checks, whereas now the overwhelming majority (87%) of looked after children and young people have these checks.

Staying safe

The contribution that the council's services for children and young people makes to improved outcomes in this area is adequate and this was the view of the joint area review. However, there has been improvement in several areas and plans are in place to sustain this direction.

The joint area review made several recommendations in this area. The council has been able to demonstrate progress in all of these. The council needed to implement an action plan to address the shortfalls in the operation of the initial response team in social care. The council supplied the action plan for the initial response team and has appointed additional management, social work staff and administrative support to ensure its efficient and effective operation. It also engaged an independent consultant to assess the quality of the assessments being undertaken by staff. The findings support the view that the council is appropriately involved with the children and families it sees. The timeliness of initial assessments has improved significantly. However, the timeliness for the completion of core assessments, while improving, is still not good. The council is aware that there are issues around both staff practice and its efficient recording that need to be addressed.

The council was also asked to implement outstanding action plans from serious case reviews. The council has updated its action plans and reference to these has been made in the routine business meetings between CSCI and the council since the joint area review reported its findings.

The council was asked to update child protection procedures and ensure that staff in all teams had access to these. The council has established its Children's Safeguarding Board and alongside this has initiated the process to review and update its procedures. It has commissioned the work of an independent agency, which is also working across West Yorkshire, so that the resultant procedures will be consistent throughout. The new procedures will be web-based to make them accessible to everyone who needs to know. The council has also ensured that the teams identified in the joint area review do now have access to the current procedures.

The joint area review recommended that the council should ensure that all looked after children cases are allocated to qualified social worker staff and this remains a challenge for the authority. The council reports that its capacity to recruit and retain qualified staff affects its capacity to allocate these cases. The council has good and innovative plans, linked to well-researched mechanisms, in place to recruit and retain staff. These are beginning to get results. The authority is confident that the team responsible for looked after children and their duty social worker system efficiently and effectively manage those cases that are not allocated to a named social worker.

The council was asked to implement the common assessment framework and to implement its preventative strategy. The council has made significant progress on both these areas. They have engaged other partner agencies and are able to ensure that there is provision of a range of services and support to children and families in need.

The council's performance with respect to adoption placements for looked after children is very good and compares well with other authorities.

The council has made some significant improvements since the joint area review to ensure that all children and young people stay safe.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes for most children and young people in Calderdale are good and the council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for all. Provision for early years has considerably expanded and settings are at least adequate and generally improving.

Attainment in primary schools is above average. When children reach secondary school, they continue to attain at least at the national average. The local authority has seen a good improvement in the numbers of those who gain five or more grades at A* to C at GCSE. In the sixth form and college, some achieve well, but not all.

Outcomes for looked after children are excellent compared with other councils and show an improvement on last year's performance. Some 80% of looked after children have achieved 1 GCSE. This is linked with high proportions of looked after children sitting GCSE examinations and the comparatively low rates of school absenteeism amongst looked after children.

The joint area review recommended that the council improve its strategy and quality assurance for 14 to 19 pathways. Much has been achieved and there are well considered plans for improving the breadth of the curriculum and ensuring that young people study subjects which will help them achieve more.

Some groups of children and young people achieve less well than their peers. For example, boys tend to do less well than girls and, overall, children at age 16 have not progressed as quickly as they did when they were younger. The local authority has responded by giving good focused attention to individual schools which both supports and challenges them to improve how well all children improve their learning. The local authority has also implemented a wide range of initiatives in less affluent areas to help young people and their families to become more engaged with their education and in planning for their future. However, there are a number of schools where pupils are not progressing as much as they should do. The authority has begun to analyse information and share with schools what it can tell them about groups of young people whose achievement is a cause for concern or who need more focused help. Learning services in particular need to ensure that schools are confident with new information about pupils' progress and over the next year have put in place measures to improve the progress for all groups and individuals.

Making a positive contribution

The council's performance in encouraging children and young people to make a positive contribution is good and the joint area review concluded similarly. The review made one recommendation in relation to this outcome. The council needed to demonstrate that services for children from minority ethnic backgrounds were accessible and that children and young people were involved in the assessment and re-design of services.

The council showed in its data return and self-assessment that children and young people are more equitably represented in service statistics. The council's care services' senior management group regularly monitors these figures and, as a result, the council is more assured that services are reaching these groups. These indicators are now more comparable with that of other councils.

One example of work in this area is where the council has identified an issue that concerns 'women of no status'. These are women who are partners of male asylum seekers and who may be fleeing domestic violence situations. The council provides both accommodation and financial support to these families. There are multi-agency arrangements in place to meet this need, although it is acknowledged these cannot be long-term solutions.

The council reports that the recruitment of carers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds remains a challenge for the authority. However, it also reports that there have been some improvements in this area.

The council has also developed innovative ways of involving young people in its consultative and planning processes. Further comment on this is made later in this letter under Service Management.

Achieving economic well-being

The council's contribution to children and young people achieving economic well-being is good. Outcomes have improved since the joint area review and a number of key indicators are now good. The council has put in place a number of measures to support families. There has been an improvement in the provision of childcare and out-of-school support. The number of settings for early years has increased more than three times as quickly as the national average so that Calderdale offers almost twice as many places for young children compared to the rest of the country. New housing for homeless families and young pregnant women opened in March 2006 providing 23 homes; this improves on private provision and reduces the time of stay there.

The proportion of care leavers who are engaged in education, training and employment is good and improving. It compares well with other authorities and is now similar to that which applies to young people in general. This implies that the council is ensuring that looked after children have at least similar opportunities to those of the wider population. More generally, the participation of 17 year olds in education is above the national average.

In recent school inspections, all schools were judged at least adequate in helping learners achieve economic well-being and two thirds were good or outstanding.

The contribution of the council to improving 14 to 19 provision is good and has improved outcomes. The majority of young people aged 14 to 19 remain in education, training or are employed; this proportion is the highest in West Yorkshire, and better than the target set. Although attainment post-16 has yet to reach that of similar authorities, it has improved at three times the national rate. The joint area review recommended that the authority improved pathways of learning for those aged 14 to 19 and established quality assurance procedures to monitor provision, guidance and outcomes. Earlier work on learning at this important phase of young people's lives has moved on considerably so that planning is appropriate and matches government expectations. The authority has canvassed young people's views and shows a good understanding of the needs of those young people who don't wish or need to study advanced courses directly after they leave school. Although the new 14 to 19 Diplomas and other courses are planned for the future, good steps have been taken to improve the breadth of provision now. For example, two vocational skills centres have been established which offer new areas of study, and the college engages well with schools to make a wider choice available. Difficulties are not side-stepped but acknowledged with both interim and long-term measures to address them. Not all schools have worked together in the past, but the authority has been successful in breaking down barriers and moved discussion on so that the three clusters of schools in 'Campus Calderdale' are working together.

The authority continues to work well with its partners in the Connexions service. There are some good and improving partnerships between the college, schools, the Learning and Skills Council and other educational and work-based learning providers.

The authority has identified that some boys who are from White backgrounds and less affluent areas achieve less well than their peers, making it difficult for them to improve their economic well-being. Their needs are targeted.

The authority has moved on considerably in the previous eight months to improve provision. School improvement officers are supporting schools to further improve teaching and learning within a broader 14 to 19 curriculum. Interim assessments suggest that these measures are improving the potential for economic well-being, particularly for those who do not share the overall good results.

Service management

The joint area review judged the council's performance in this area as adequate but viewed their capacity to improve as good. The council has been able to demonstrate significant progress on all of the recommendations made by the review.

The council was asked to maintain a focus on workforce strategy and planning, particularly around issues of recruitment and retention. The council reports that workforce recruitment and retention has been a long-standing problem. Three years ago, the council took the bold step of recruiting staff from Australia. The council regard the project as successful, although they acknowledge that this was not intended to be a long-term solution.

The council has re-evaluated its strategy for recruitment and retention of social care staff and the result is a multi-faceted approach that involves: collecting information from exit interviews; participating in recruitment fairs together with the West Yorkshire Consortium; providing bursaries for final year social work students placed with the authority; and increasing placement opportunities for final year social work students within the council. A

significant problem for the council is staff turnover in front-line posts. When promotion to management posts is not available within the council, these staff are likely to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. As a result, the council is also considering developing 'senior practitioner' posts for front-line staff to help retain staff, offer promotion for staff and maintain continuity at the service level.

These measures have effected improvements in vacancy rates from 40% at the time of the joint area review to a position now where most teams are fully staffed and the highest vacancy rate for any team is 20%.

The joint area review recommended that in delivering the Every Child Matters agenda the council needed to bring together the interlinked strategies in a coherent framework that results in improved commissioning of services for young people and their families, together with a review of the forward plan and resources available to the children and young people's service to ensure continued effectiveness. An overarching plan for children's services has been agreed with partner organisations and this is supported by the action plan from the review, the preventative strategy, the looked after children strategy and common assessment framework processes. These plans are comprehensive, yet specific and targeted, with considerable progress having being made.

The review recommended that for the longer term, the council needed to improve performance management and quality assurance. The council states that it has made some progress with respect to its client information system. They are currently engaged in data cleansing exercises and have a working group that involves both IT specialists and social care practitioner staff to ensure the systems being developed are fit for purpose. The system is working but subject to checking mechanisms so that managers can be more confident about the management information being produced.

The review recommended that the council should involve children and young people in evaluation, monitoring and planning activities at a strategic level and consult more effectively with the disability youth forum. The council indicated that it had undertaken various activities to consult with its services' users. This was impressive. There was evidence of both the events that had taken place and of the feedback the council had provided to children and young people about what the council had understood from the consultations and what they were going to do about it. The activities included focus groups for young people, surveys, 'text' communications with young people and involving young people in the appointment of staff – including their recent appointments of heads of services.

We confirm that the children's services grade will provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and will be published to the Audit Commission. The social care judgement is for CSCI information only.

Yours sincerely



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